

# *fast* FACTS...

January 2004

*about Sedgwick County Government*



## *Meningitis*

### *What is meningococcal meningitis?*

Meningococcal meningitis is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream and meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord). It is a relatively rare disease and usually occurs as a single isolated event. Clusters of cases or outbreaks are also possible. The bacteria that causes this is called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

### *Who gets meningococcal meningitis?*

Anyone can get meningococcal meningitis, but it is more common in infants, children, and young adults. Also, college students who live in dormitories and others in large group housing have a slightly higher risk of getting this infection than others their age.

### *How is meningitis spread?*

The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, kissing). Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. Many people carry this particular germ in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

### *What are the symptoms of meningitis and how soon do they appear?*

Although most people exposed to the meningococcus germ do not become seriously ill, some may develop fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash. Up to 25 percent of patients who recover may have permanent damage to the nervous system. The disease occasionally causes death.

The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

### *How long is the diagnosed person contagious?*

From the time a person is first infected until the germ is no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat, he or she may transmit the disease. The duration varies among individuals and with the treatment used.

### *How can I get more information on Meningitis?*

For more information on Meningitis or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7300. Or visit the Sedgwick County website at [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).

### *How is meningitis treated?*

Certain antibiotics are very effective in eliminating the germ from the nose and throat. Penicillin is normally prescribed for meningitis.

### *Should others who have had contact with the diagnosed patient be treated?*

Only people who have been in close contact (household members, intimate contacts, health care personnel performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, day care center play-mates) need to be considered for preventive treatment. Such people are usually advised to obtain a prescription for special antibiotics from their physician. Casual contact which occurs in a regular classroom, office or factory setting is not usually significant enough to cause concern. People who think they have been exposed to meningococcal infection should contact their local health department to discuss whether they should receive preventive treatment.

### *Is there a vaccine available to treat meningitis and where can I get it?*

Presently, there is a vaccine that will protect against several of the strains of the meningococcus germ, but it is only recommended in outbreak situations or for travel to areas of the world where high rates of the disease are known to occur. It is highly recommended that students living in dorms or in close quarters with others receive the meningococcal vaccine.

Meningococcal vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Health Department for \$90. Local physicians may also have the vaccine.

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